

Sketch

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Rabies

Leonard Muller*

*Iowa State College

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Abstract

The light from the kitchen window fell on a lone figure hunched on the ground with his arms around his knees. In the dim shadows of dusk, he appeared as rundown as the house behind him...



Rabies

by Leonard Mueller
Electrical Engineering, Sr.

THE LIGHT from the kitchen window fell on a lone figure hunched on the ground with his arms around his knees. In the dim shadows of dusk, he appeared as run-down as the house behind him. Occasionally he lifted his head to glance at the wolf-like shadow pacing back and forth by a tree.

Might as well admit it; only one thing would make him act like that. I'll get the twelve-gauge and put him out of his misery.

But the old man continued to sit in the position he had maintained since he finished washing his supper dishes. In the west, the last trace of the sun was falling behind a brush-covered hill. The darkness was oozing in from across the town as though it were not afraid to come, now that the dog was dying. For ten years, the beast had kept the town at bay, but now death was moving in like the night.

The morning of the day before, the dog had begun acting strangely. When the old man had tried to feed him, he had snapped. For the rest of the day Herman had watched the nervous movement increase. By evening it had become obvious that the disease had set in, but Herman had tied the dog up so he could watch him and make sure.

The lack of sleep was wearing on the man's aging body. His eyes were shadows in his gaunt face, and a stubble of whiskers was beginning to form, merging with his disheveled hair. He stared at the darkening town.

What am I waiting for? I'm sure now, and it ain't going to get any easier.

The dog appeared as a young pup wiggling in a pair of calloused hands. "Yes sir, he's pure German shepherd. Course, he ain't pedigreed, but if you know dogs like you say you do, you can tell by looking at him that he's pure."

"Yeh, I think he'll do." Then the touch of soft fur was in his hands. It was an eager thing.

God, he was smart. A German shepherd has more sense than any man. Herman smiled. *Lobo sure learned fast.*

He was back, putting the dog through its paces, teaching him to growl at strangers. "Those kids aren't going to sneak out from town anymore and prowl around here. That dog looks as mean as a wolf." . . . *Lobo was a good name for him. Anyway, it helped scare the kids.*

It had been after one morning when he had awakened to find the word, QUEER, scrawled in chalk across his doorstep, that he had decided to get the dog. *Damned kids.*

He was disturbed by a low whine from the shape moving at the end of a leash. The man almost vomited at the sound. He recovered himself and looked at the moving shadow, then he began to speak quietly, the way he had always talked to dogs.

"Lie down and be quiet."

The motion stopped.

He understands . . . of course he understands.

But there was another low whine and the form began moving again until it was stopped by the leash. Herman gathered his strength together, rose, and walked to the back porch. The old door stuck, and he yanked it open, then strode to the gun rack. His hand was almost on the spot where the weapon rested upright in a shadow, when he froze, silhouetted in the light filtering in from the kitchen.

He was ready to go hunting. Lobo was standing there eager to flush out game. Johnson would never know they were using his brushland. . . . Or was it Lobo . . . Johnson's land . . . No, he was young; it was the weeds along the

creek, and it wasn't a German shepherd; it was a collie . . . Wonderful; nobody around, except in his imagination. All around was rough hemp. The smell bit into his nose. . . . A rabbit! He grabbed his gun from where it was leaning against a fallen tree.

The cold touch of steel brought reality back. He looked down at the form in his hands, then reached for the box on the bottom shelf of the rack. He dug down and scooped out a handful of the slick cylinders. He slipped five into the gun and pumped one into the chamber. As the click echoed through the shadows on the porch, the old man's muscles twitched. He forced himself toward the door, but stopped with his hand on the knob.

. . . WILSON DELIVERS WAR MESSAGE . . . A rifle in his hands . . . Orders were flying at him like arrows from every direction and he couldn't hide from them. . . . Then he was standing in an office. *"So you know how to handle dogs."* . . . *"Yes sir."* . . . *"Then I think we've got a place for you. You don't seem to get along well with the men, so I'm going to put you to work training police dogs for use as sentries."* . . . *"Thank you, sir."*

A smile slid in behind the shadows on Herman's face. *Good days. Nobody gave me orders, at least not after they found out I could make a dog do anything I wanted.*

The noise of the dogs in the compounds . . . *"Attack!"* As the huge animal leapt at a man with protective clothing, Herman felt the sense of power. The dogs had to learn to kill, so he trained them; and no matter how deadly they became, they seldom disobeyed. It was exhilarating to be the source of food and praise for something so strong.

Then the dogs were gone, and the smile slid from his face. He opened the door and stepped outside. A cold mist was beginning to settle on the ground. He looked over toward the town. The few dim lights made the fog more noticeable. Behind the dark shadows, the man's face contracted into bitterness.

The war was over, and he found himself home. *"Look, if you're not sure what you want to do, why don't you help me run the store?"*

Herman was listening to the ticking of the clock and staring blankly at the figures in the wallpaper. The thought of going around and asking people for a job ate into his mind.

"Well, what do you think?"

The mahogany in the furniture stood as coldly as soldiers in an inspection, . . . but still, it was security.

"I suppose I might give it a try."

The sign read PIKE & SON IMPLEMENT. . . . a cavernous building covered with tin. The interior was dark. At one side, a counter with a cash register at the end and behind the counter, aisles with bins on the sides. Farmers in bibbed overalls stood talking endlessly. *Why can't they buy their stuff and leave.* He dared not say it aloud, so he remained sullen.

He shivered. The mist had gotten thicker and colder, until the town had practically disappeared. Herman turned his gaze toward the pair of eyes in the shadows. He continued to stand frozen with his hands clutched around the gun.

Now the sign read, PIKE'S IMPLEMENT, and the tin was beginning to loosen on the building. Machinery parts lay in confusion over the shelves and on the floor. An old farmer was looking at a coil of hay rope. The farmers weren't doing well, and Herman was sure that this was the reason trade was slow. *People can't buy when they ain't got any money. At least I can get credit.*

Herman let out a short laugh. *Sure, easy credit. Lots and lots of credit.* There were the bankruptcy proceedings and then sketchy memories of asking people for work . . . no, not asking, begging.

He jerked and moved a few steps in the direction of the town. His breath came faster.

"I don't have to ask any of you for a damn thing now. Someone else can beg for a few crumbly days of work. Uncle Sam gives me social security and a veteran's pension to boot. I can get along without any of you bastards for the rest of my life."

He waved the gun defiantly. His voice rose.

"You think your kids can come prowling out to look at

the old queer now that Lobo's dying. I'll get another dog. And I'll train him to kill. You hear that? I'll train him to kill, and I know how to do it. There won't any of you come near me for the rest of my life."

He became rigid. For several minutes he stood motionless. A rising whine bit into him and he wheeled. He moved tensely toward the sound of the dog's breathing. The eyes became visible in the darkness. He moved closer, and the outline of the body came into view. He raised the gun and aimed at the eyes. He hesitated, then fired. The shadow rolled backwards and went into convulsions.

"Die damn it, die!"

He pumped the gun and fired into the hulk. He fired a third shot, then a fourth. When he looked down, motion had ceased. The form lay still.

His strength began to drain away with the animal's blood. He stood motionless for some time and finally turned and moved away a few steps. The town was gone, and the stars had disappeared under a blanket of clouds. Only the square of light from the kitchen window remained. He took another slow step and pumped the last shell into the chamber.

Purge

by Michael J. Leonard

English, Sr.

nihil, nego, nada, non
 irr, ill, un, in:
 good-bye kikes
 and jigs
 and nips
 and chinks
 and wops
 and spiks
 and this the yes men
 call their creed.